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Most phone conversations start with “How are you doing?” and the frequent response is some variation of “I’m extremely busy.” At no point in human history have people had so much to do and keep up with. People are straining to get everything done at work, home, and even in their “time off” when on vacation. Stress, lack of sleep, poor fitness, bad nutrition, and related medical conditions such as high blood pressure are at an all-time high. Many people start their workday early, fill their day with back-to-back activities, and end late. For good reason most conference calls, meetings, appointments, dinners, and dates start late.

There are many culprits in today’s hurried life style. People take on too much. Parents enroll their children in too many extracurricular activities. Customers demand better service. Managers pursue loftier goals. Employees are expected to do more. Competition intensifies. Governments require more reporting and compliance. Offshoring, outsourcing, and “expense reduction” programs create shadow costs that add complexity. Poor customer service, complicated user interfaces, and mediocre products turn simple tasks into difficult ones not to mention the hours spent on support phone calls. Technology requires frequent upgrades. Just resolving one health insurance issue or replacing one technology device can take hours if not days. Keeping up with synchronizing, updating, and charging your phone, watch, tablet, laptop, camera, cordless drill, bike, car, and battery backup is a hassle at best. Then there are the hundreds of daily emails, texts, social media notifications, and information updates that are a fulltime job in themselves. The new normal is overwhelming!

Studies find over three-fourths of the workforce is stressed with up to two-thirds burned out to the point of experiencing extreme fatigue and feeling out of control. The harsh reality is the majority of workers are worn out, stressed out, and put out. Doing more with less has reached an inflection point. People can no longer keep up with daily tactical demands, much less do anything strategic, have time for reflection, or simply take a break to recharge their body’s battery. Fewer and fewer people are taking time to care for themselves, invest in themselves, and work “on” their life because they are consumed with work “in” their life. Many are stuck on the *treadmill of busyness as usual*.

Is being tired, stressed out, and living a hurried lifestyle just part of the new normal to which people must adjust? Is relief from the new normal adequately handled by adding more liquor stores, bars, masseuses, counselors, coaches, medical clinics, and mental wards? Or maybe we just need more doctors and hospitals. Studies reveal 75 to 90 percent of all doctor visits are for stress related issues with 5 out of 6 leading causes of death citing stress as a factor.

Besides escapism and medical remedies, what options are available for dealing with stress and burn out? People can say “no” more often, but then risk passing on important opportunities, losing respect, and receiving a lower performance rating. People can delegate more, but often lack anyone to delegate to. They could ignore strategic initiatives, but would sacrifice their future. They could ignore tactical needs, but would immediately fall behind. They could work at being more productive, but would just do more work.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on how you view the new normal, advances in technology will continue to provide more conveniences and tempting opportunities. But as the pace of change continues unabated, comes more complexity, risks, maintenance, troubleshooting, upgrades, synchronization, optimization, and things to do than people have time for. Feeling overwhelmed will be an ongoing challenge.

So here are five steps you can take to cope with the increasing workload associated with the new normal:

- **Exercise** – Exercise moves your body, creates good stress, makes you feel good, and produces beneficial hormones that relax your mind. Bike, hike, walk, run, do yoga, or lift weights. Join a gym, get in a court, or spend time on a field. Hire a trainer. Being in shape also improves your self-image which relieves a common source of stress. The time you spend exercising is more than returned through increased energy and mental acuity.
- **Maintain proper nutrition** – What you put in your body has a huge impact on your energy level and how you feel. Limit your intake of junk food, simple carbohydrates, and sugar which slow you down. Eat stress reducing foods such as whole grains, nuts, berries, and foods rich in Vitamin B. Take supplements to offset any mineral or vitamin deficiencies you have. Restrict your quantities to match your exercise level.
- **Make time for relaxation** – Give your mind a break every now and then. Get away from annoying distractions like email and social media so your mind can relax. Light a candle, turn on the music, and sip a cup of tea. Or relax in a hot-tub, steam room, or bathtub. Get a massage, sit on your porch, or simply lean back in your favorite chair. There is a reason some of the world’s best ideas came while sitting under a tree or in a bathtub.
- **Prioritize** – Don’t let the urgent, convenient, trivial, or comfortable replace the important. Allocate the majority of your time and energy to your top 2-3 initiatives. Do less with more. Be discerning with your resources. Delegate, outsource, say “no”, or put conditions on your “yes”s to that which you don’t need to do or doesn’t support your goals. Be discerning about how you use your most precious resource, i.e. your time.
- **Get organized** – Be as efficient as you can with the work you decide to do. Set up systems to help manage your projects, files, assets, finances, payments, and workflow. Use your calendar for managing your to-do list and follow-up items. Leverage your tools, computer applications, and technology features. Follow the “touch once” principle. Eliminate as much paper as possible. A clear desk makes for a clear mind.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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